This paper describes the findings and main issues addressed by the "Social Struggle and Collective Memory in Low Price Housing in Barcelona" research and analysis project commissioned in 2009 by the Associació de Veïns Avis del Barri de Bon Pastor and carried out by an interdisciplinary team of historians, anthropologists and architects linked to the Catalan Institute of Anthropology which also included people living in the low price housing. The gradual demolition of most of these neighborhoods on the outskirts of Barcelona shows the rollout of cultural dynamics that build a "city image" which is incompatible with some of its population sectors. In this context, anthropological research has to face great challenges but can also do some important work: documenting social transformations that have been linked to the modification of urban space and the role in this process of the selective reconfiguration of historical memory, especially that memory of struggle and resistance which is almost inseparable from the identity of these neighborhoods

S'exposen aquí els resultats i les principals temàtiques abordades pel projecte de recerca-anàlisi «Lluita social i memòria col·lectiva a les cases barates de Barcelona» encarregat el 2009 a l'Associació de Veïns Avis del Barri en Defensa dels Inquilins de Bon Pastor i realitzat per un equip interdisciplinari d'historiadors, antropòlegs i arquitectes vinculats a l'Institut Català d'Antropologia, i integrat també per habitants de les cases barates. La demolició progressiva de la major part d'aquests barris dels marges de Barcelona permet d'observar el desplegament de dinàmiques culturals que construeixen una *imatge de ciutat* incompatible amb alguns dels seus sectors de població. En aquest context, la recerca antropològica ha d'enfrontar-se amb grans desafiaments, però pot realitzar una tasca important: documentar les transformacions socials que han estat vinculades a la modificació de l'espai urbà, i el paper que té en aquest procés la reconfiguració selectiva de la memòria històrica, en particular d'aquella memòria de lluita i resistència gairebé consubstancial a la identitat d'aquests barris.

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Portelli is a cultural anthropologist and founder of the Urban Peripheries group of the Catalan Institute of Anthropology. After a number of fieldwork studies on the impact of developmental processes and urban transformation on peripheral neighbourhoods in Nicaragua, Catalonia and Italy, he is now part of the Department of Urban Planning Engineering (DICEA) at the Sapienza University of Roma. He has worked in Sicily, Morocco, Kenya, Cambodia and Nepal, while his most important research was carried out from 2004 to 2012 in the "cases barates" (cheap houses) area in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood of Barcelona.

The Horizontal City

Social Struggle and Collective Memory on the Fringes of Barcelona

The "Social Struggle and Collective Memory in Low Price Housing in Barcelona" study that we conducted from 2009 to 2011 within the framework of the Ethnological Heritage Inventory of Catalonia (IPEC) is the product of an unusual, intergenerational and intercultural collaboration that emerged from one of the city's least known and most stigmatized neighborhoods –Bon Pastor, in the district of Sant Andreu– between a group of residents affected by a large-scale demolition plan and a number of social researchers interested in in-depth study of the impact of urban transformations on the most disadvantaged sectors of the population. Historically, the four districts of Casas Baratas (low-cost social housing –literally, "cheap houses") in Barcelona –built by the city under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship on the occasion of the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition– had not been subject to any systematic research like the studies of other suburbs of Barcelona. With the exception of the very recent *Rastros de rostros en un prado rojo (y negro)* (Traces of Faces in a Red (and Black) Meadow) by Pere López Sánchez (2013), literary and journalistic descriptions of the four housing estates have reproduced a series of negative stereotypes that could be considered functional with respect to demolition of the Casas Baratas. Some examples would be the description of the Casas Baratas as obscure pockets of misery and violence in *The City of Marvels* (Mendoza, 1986: 372-373) and the difficulties Francesc Candel faced following publication of his works (1957, 1964) upon returning to "his" neighborhood (the Eduard Aunós affordable housing estate in

Keywords: urban anthropology, history of Barcelona, neighborhoods, urban renewal, social disarticulation, political anthropology, historical memory, engaged anthropology, urban studies, worker homes, Barcelona, Sant Andreu, Bon Pastor, Can Peguera, Eduard Aunós

Paraules clau: antropologia urbana, història de Barcelona, barris, transformació urbana, desarticulació social, antropologia política, memòria històrica, Barcelona, Sant Andreu, Bon Pastor, cases barates, Can Peguera, Eduard Aunós

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Zona Franca), and they lead us to understand to what extent a "negative myth" in the sense identified by anthropologist Gary McDonough in the Raval neighborhood (1987) pervaded the whole narrative of the four districts.

Undoubtedly, however, the affordable housing estates were much more than this myth. Their specific urban shape and their peculiar history allowed a popular culture distinct from that of the rest of the city to be maintained there. As was highlighted even by David Harvey (2002), Barcelona's recent evolution involved the disappearance of a large part of the areas that provided the city with its symbolic capital: the working class neighborhoods where the collective identity of the city's working classes was forged was systematically attacked by large urban transformation projects –from the historic center to El Poblenou to L'Hospitalet to the banks of the Besòs River. As Jaume Franquesa emphasized in one of the pioneering studies on the impact of a demolition in a Spanish city, there is always a "legitimizing narrative" corresponding to the "city project" that institutions plan for a given area that facilitates its execution (2010 [2005]: 60). The attempt to demolish the Casas Baratas was variously pursued by the municipal authorities (who held land ownership) during the Franco dictatorship, and it was prevented by firm opposition from the first neighborhood associations, which were often still clandestine (Fabre and Huertas Clavería, 1975: 87, 99-100). It was in the democratic era that the first two housing estates, Baró de Viver and Eduard Aunós, were demolished, within the framework of the "new developmentalism" that gained force around the 1992 Summer Olympics (McNeill, 1999). The demolition of Bon Pastor, approved in 2002 and begun in 2007, represents the final episode in this series of destructive projects using a legitimizing narrative based largely on the *negative myth* that had been endemically applied to these territories.

This demolition was also, however, the only one in this long history that social researchers had the chance to observe in detail. From our study of the Bon Pastor Casas Baratas in 2004, we observed how the discourse that justified the project to demolish the entire neighborhood –euphemistically defined as the *Redevelopment Plan*– involved a symbolic attack on the identity and self-representation of the inhabitants of this low-cost housing. The district was presented as an obsolete and deprived area in the press and municipal communication; the discourse on the *isolation* of Bon Pastor, variously repeated, dominated all public representation. There was no consideration for the area's local culture and characteristic lifestyle, nor was any study of the human impact conducted prior to ordering the demolition of an area with nearly a century of history. As was noted by Horacio Capel,

The Casas Baratas of Bon Pastor from above. CAROLA PAGANI, 2004

A group of residents of the Casas Baratas sitting on the street. CAROLA PAGANI, 2004

"the use of the qualifier "obsolete" is excessive; it is used to make unjustified decisions" (Capel, 2004). The new leftist turn in the demolition discourse further deepened the stigma endemically attributed to the Bon Pastor area (Wacquant, 2007): it was through this realization that our relationship with the Associació de Veïns Avis del Barri en Defensa dels Inquilins de Bon Pastor (Association of Elderly Residents in Defense of the Inhabitants of Bon Pastor) began.

This association, formed in 2003 through a split from the Associació de Veïns de Bon Pastor (Association of Bon Pastor Residents) as a result of the approval of the project to demolish the Casas Baratas, took a critical stance against urban planning, but it needed to discover to what extent such opposition was founded amongst the housing's residents. A door-to-door survey was conducted in the summer of 2004 among the first residences in the neighborhood to be affected, those making up the so-called *first phase* of demolition. As a group, we came from a series of urban anthropology and oral history studies on the social impact of urban transformations, especially in the districts of La Mina and El Poblenou, with a team that would soon become the Grup de Treball Perifèries Urbanes (Working Group on Urban Peripheries) within the Institut Català d'Antropologia, but nowhere else had we found a group of residents who expressly requested a research project that would serve them as an instrument of struggle. A dubious *referendum,* non-binding and supported by the same neighborhood association that was negotiating the demolition with the city council, was publicized as a guarantee of local participation in the urban planning decision: 54% of voters had said *yes* to the municipal project, although many did not even know what they had voted for, as the association of elderly residents observed.

Our survey turned the results of the referendum *upside down* (PVCE, 2004). Not only did we record 40 opinions explicitly against the demolition and only 11 decidedly in favor out of 100 interviews, but among the fifty-odd remaining interviews we observed a variability and complexity of stances that was impossible to reduce to a *yes* or a *no*. The district unfolded before us in all of its contradictions: the discourse of progress and articulations of the *negative myth* had penetrated deep into the population, which in turn resisted accepting many of the implications of the city's planning. In particular, however, what emerged from these initial interviews was history. The neighborhood's past –marked by the migration of many of the families from the south of Spain, by authorities' systematic disregard for the land and its inhabitants, by social struggle and the 1930s project to emancipate Barcelona's proletariat politically and socially, by anti-Franco militia, by bombings, by exile and the reprisals suffered during the Franco dictatorship (see Gallardo Romero, 2000)– continued to influence the identities and consciousness of Bon Pastor residents, and still more with the demolition of the Casas Baratas taking shape on the horizon. Nowhere else in the city were we able to get so in touch with this interrelation between popular culture, inhabited space and collective memory: the demolition was stirring up many significant aspects of Barcelona's historical identity in a manner similar to what Manuel Vázquez Montalbán had demonstrated with respect to the Raval during the Olympics. "The new Barcelona is all about forgetting," as Donald McNeill wrote (1999: 52).

A few years passed between this initial study and the start of the first research contract with the IPEC. In 2006, the same 100 families that we had interviewed two years earlier began to relocate to new buildings constructed on a site nearby, with some excited and others anxious. In 2007, a handful of these families decided to resist the order of eviction and demand economic compensation for the move, which they perceived not as a chance to *escape isolation* but as an irreplaceable loss of their living space and *places of memory* imposed by city planning that was vertical, just as the new apartment buildings were vertical in comparison with their Casas Baratas. The

Association of Elderly Residents supported the struggle of these dissidents, but they could do nothing when on 19 October a large-scale police operation evicted them from their homes, the rent for which they were still paying, with a violent charge that wounded ten. The following year, relocated to new apartments, some members of these families began to meet with us, and our research soon began to take shape. While it had not been possible to resist the physical force employed by the Guàrdia Urbana (municipal police), it was possible to attempt to act on the cultural level, developing a discourse that challenged the stereotypes used to depict Bon Pastor in a language of exclusion and which served as an excuse for urban and social planning that was deeply unpopular. We returned to interview the inhabitants of the Casas Baratas in 2009, this time delving deeper into the history and life paths of neighborhood families, beginning with the dissidents and moving on to all sectors of local residents, proceeding in circles.

A traditionally closed neighborhood, reserved with "outsiders" and mistrustful of institutions, opened up to our view just from the support we had given to some residents in trouble when fighting the evictions. We would clearly never again be able to maintain the role of *objective* and impartial observers, a role we probably did not even have when we first came into contact with Bon Pastor. In a space where, physically, everyone is observed and ranked as soon as they set foot on the first street, it is impossible to pretend you are different than you are. From the beginning this placed our research in line with what is globally being defined as engaged anthropology: a style of research that does not purport to simulate impartiality –which for some time has been considered impossible– but instead makes explicit the stance one takes and the role one has in contributing to strengthening relations on the ground. As the North American anthropologist Michael Herzfeld explained in regard to his research in the Pom Mahakan district of Bangkok, in the face of criticism directed at him by the authorities with respect to what they deemed excessive involvement in defense of the neighborhood's residents against the evictions, he responded that this engagement was precisely what enabled him to understand aspects of community life that he did not have access to without siding firmly with those affected (Herzfeld, 2010: 261). It was indeed our proximity to a number of local residents that allowed us to see into some aspects of the inhabitants' *cultural intimacy* (Herzfeld, 1997) and use them to refute the prejudices of the *negative myth*. This partnership, which grew out of the conflict, served to reduce the distance that had historically separated the neighborhoods of Casas Baratas from the places where discourse about the city is produced.

Members of the Association of Elderly Residents in Defense of the Inhabitants of Bon Pastor hang a banner against the City Council.
CAROLA PAGANI, 2004

The team that managed the entirety of the research from the moment the project was drafted was thus made up by social researchers from the Institut Català d'Antropologia like Stefano Portelli, Ulrike Viccaro and Núria Sánchez Armengol and inhabitants of the Casas Baratas such as Sandra Capdevila, evicted by the Guàrdia Urbana in 2007; some members of the Association of Elderly Residents continued the research from the outset (like Ramon Fenoy, Luis Nuevo, Aurora Sardaña, Josep Capdevila, José María Manzano and Moisés Garre), despite having some mistrust of and insecurity about sudden interest from an institution, the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya, which up to that point they had seen only as complicit in the demolition of their neighborhood. The collaboration was not easy: the languages were different and the political implications were often difficult to manage. Every aspect of the research, from the selection of interviewees to the collection of documents to the conclusions drawn and even the writing of the final monograph was negotiated between local residents and researchers: the boundaries between "us" and "them" became blurred from the moment some of us went to live in the neighborhood for a year, observing up close and even suffering in our own skin some aspects of the social impact of the urban transformation.

This experience in collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) in an area with an ongoing conflict was difficult to manage: the sector of the population that collaborated in planning the demolition naturally saw us as bothersome intruders and even political enemies, and many refused to be interviewed. We felt that this was a risk we had to run in order to be able to gain an *internal* position in the area being researched, and it did not stop us from making a progressive approach to the sectors of the population in favor of the demolition: by 2010 we had almost fully emancipated ourselves from all circles of relations of the Association of Elderly Residents, and we interviewed many people with radically different stances. We thus came to understand how popular culture, far from being a uniform set of shared traits and behaviors, is instead a language through which alliances or ruptures can be transmitted, according to the occasion: it can just as easily work as a link as it can serve to convey resentment and reciprocal hatred. This is why we were interested in collective forms of managing coexistence and conflict.

A woman from Bon Pastor showing the kitchen of her *casa barata* awaiting demolition.
CAROLA PAGANI, 2004

From its founding the Bon Pastor area was "semi-autonomous" with respect to the municipal authorities: first as a "dump" where the city threw undesirable sectors of the population, unconcerned with their fate; later as an area of purely working-class resistance, impenetrable to institutional control; and still later as an area that had been pacified politically but where a widespread a-legality concealed a silent political dissidence. Throughout their history, then, the inhabitants of the Casas Baratas had to develop autonomous forms of conflict management that avoided giving authorities an excuse to enter the neighborhood and collect information on an area opaque to their surveillance. Even today, traces of this *horizontal* self-management of coexistence can be observed in the day-to-day of the inhabitants of the Casas Baratas, which on one hand convey the memory of a history of political autonomy and on the other are supported in the horizontal urban shape of the neighborhood. Many elements of life in the Casas Baratas can be considered forms of managing local coexistence and at the same time instruments for preventing the explosion of conflicts. Some elements would be the frequent *corrillos* (small groups of people talking) in the narrow streets between the houses, which stave off many fights among neighbors; the constant gossip, which, while on the one hand it pushes towards conformity, on the other it prevents antisocial behaviors; and the tight-knit networks of relatives, neighbors and friends that allow for the passage of information also in moments of tension and between the opposing sides of a fight. The apotheosis of these

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ethnotechniques, as we defined them, is the night of Sant Joan, which celebrates collective appropriation of public space, the street, as a critical place for negotiating coexistence. Around the fire, eating, drinking and dancing together, the residents of each street collectively overcome tensions, periodically starting to live together from scratch again.

With the recent ban on the fire festival and the beginning of the demolition of the Casas Baratas, these ethnotechniques were in decline. The conflict over the redevelopment plan, which divided residents between in favor and opposed, could not be settled through these collective forms of management, and from the outset both sides parted company, not only insulting each other publically as "had always been done," but filing legal complaints in court or with the police: they thus adhered to a *vertical* form of managing coexistence, mediated by institutions, which penetrated the area in parallel to the construction of the apartment blocks –that is, the verticalization of the inhabited space. This dialectic between horizontality and verticality, simultaneously urban and social, was our key to understanding the complexity of the stakes of the conflict generated by the "redevelopment" of Bon Pastor: urban transformations have a profound impact on managing coexistence, which in turn is a product of the particular history and allows for the daily updating of this collective heritage. The residents of the Casas Baratas were losing many of their unifying elements, and a transformation in social organization corresponded to the geographic substitution of the inhabited space. The *objective correlative* relationship that ties the spatial modification to the change in relations among residents is the aspect of this history that fascinated us most and the one we found most important in the sphere of anthropology.

A family from Carrer Tàrrega at a house that was demolished in 2010.
CAROLA PAGANI, 2004

Many anthropologists of the colonial era showed how the modification of space was used by missionaries in their attempts to colonize the natives. Lévi-Strauss wrote in *Tristes Tropiques* that "the Salesian missionaries in the Rio de Garças region were quick to realize that the surest way to convert the Bororo was to make them abandon their [circular] village in favour of one with the houses set out in parallel rows. Once they had been deprived of their bearings and were without the plan which acted as a confirmation of their native lore, the Indians soon lost any feeling for tradition; it was as if their social and religious systems (we shall see that one cannot be dissociated from the other) were too complex to exist without the pattern which was embodied in the plan of the village and of which their awareness was constantly being refreshed by their everyday activities" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955: 204). Another French anthropologist, Robert Jaulin, identified the modification of traditional space as one of the elements that had a decisive influence on the "ethnocide" of the Motilon people: "An unusual variation in *habitat* not only brings about a material discomfort but also deeply disturbs human relationships, family intimacy, some moral qualities, social balance, the organization of responsibilities and an order and nobility that had called our attention" (Jaulin, 1970: 65). The demolition of the Casas Baratas, while not ethnocide, undoubtedly represents an attack on popular culture in Barcelona, on the autonomy of certain disadvantaged sectors of the population, on the human diversity that still exists between urban boundaries. In part it recalls the "cultural genocide" of the periphery of Rome described by Pasolini, the process that determined the homologation of behaviors and adaptation to standards defined from above in the 1960s and 1970s.

As Manuel Vázquez Montalbán wrote during the Olympic period for the introduction to the English edition of his book *Barcelonas*: "Those English travelers who have already visited or intend to visit Barcelona should be aware that not one but several cities are contained within its municipal boundaries, and that nearly all of them have been radically changed under the impact of the Olympics" (Vázquez Montalbán, 1992: 3). Only now, 20

years later, are we beginning to work on the specific dynamics with which this impact modified the least known and peripheral *Barcelonas*. Through the experience of this research, we came to understand how difficult it could be for us to get closer to a space historically marked by difference and *otherness* in relation to a city and its official discourse and at the same time maintain the necessary distance to understand and describe it. Greek architect Stavros Stavrides, an expert on the commons, has written on this type of approach: "In order to approach otherness in an act of mutual awareness, one needs to carefully dwell on the threshold. In this transitory territory that belongs to neither of the neighbouring parts, one understands that it is necessary to feel the distance so as to be able to erect the bridge. Hostility arises from the preservation and increase of this distance while assimilation results from the obliteration of distance. Encounter is realized by keeping the necessary distance while crossing it at the same time" (Stavrides, 2011: 18).

Reticent about institutional control, hidden by the distance imposed from the center, the Casas Baratas, like other districts of Barcelona, were the threshold spaces where a population with very different migratory routes and histories found common ground for negotiation and rapprochement, building a *horizontal* sociality that remained largely unchanged until well into the new millennium. All of this research and the future book where the results will be presented –which, logically, will be called *The Horizontal City*– should be understood as a tribute to the Barcelona that 80 years ago was able to proudly transform *concentrationary* spaces, designed to move undesirable workers away from the center, into veritable garden cities where differences and conflicts were self-managed; the same city that has again today emerged from its ashes in the empty plots of land and vacant lots turned into kitchen gardens, in the occupied squares where popular assemblies are held, in the abandoned buildings transformed into centers disseminating popular culture. The Casas Baratas represent this capacity for resistance, self-organization and spontaneous mediation of conflict that will continue to resurface in Barcelona despite repression and mass demolitions. Returning to Stavrides (2011: 18), this is the wisdom hidden in the threshold experience: "the awareness that otherness can only be approached by opening the borders of identity, forming –so to speak– intermediary zones of doubt, ambivalence, hybridity, zones of negotiable values." ■

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Article originally published in Catalan in **Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya (no.39. year 2014)** under the title **La ciutat horitzontal. Lluita social i memòria col·lectiva als marges de Barcelona.**